

Mexico Senate passes medical pot bill; sent to lower house

December 14 2016, by Peter Orsi

The Senate on Tuesday overwhelmingly passed a bill approving the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes, the latest in a series of legal changes and court rulings that have somewhat relaxed cannabis laws in Mexico.

The Senate said in a statement summarizing the debate that the measure directs the Health Department to "design public policies to regulate the medicinal use of this plant and its derivatives."

The legislation now goes to the lower Chamber of Deputies for consideration.

Sen. Cristina Diaz Salazar, a member of President Enrique Pena Nieto's Institutional Revolutionary Party, said the measure aims to solve the urgent needs of Mexicans who are unable to access pot-based medicines.

According to the summary, she called it "a historic step."

Some lawmakers argued that the bill does not go far enough because it does not cover individual cultivation of marijuana, other narcotics such as opium paste and poppies, or broader issues such as the war on drugs.

Sen. Armando Rios Piter of the leftist Democratic Revolution Party voted no. He acknowledged the legislation would benefit patients suffering from some chronic diseases, but called it a "very small" achievement that fails to address "the failure of the policy of combatting

organized crime."

"To celebrate that we are making a material change on marijuana would be fooling ourselves at this stage of the game," Rios Piter was quoted as saying.

In the decade since then-President Felipe Calderon launched a militarized offensive against Mexico's drug cartels, more than 100,000 people have been killed and some 30,000 more are missing.

Starting last year the Mexican government began granting permits letting some patients import medicinal marijuana products. It has also decriminalized small amounts of marijuana and issued several permits for people to cultivate and possess pot for personal use.

Those permits have only covered the specific individuals involved, however, rather than blanket laws applicable to all of Mexican society.

The bill passed Tuesday would also authorize cultivation of [marijuana](#) plants for medical and scientific purposes and establish that industrial products with concentrations of 1 percent THC or less would be legal to buy, sell, import and export.

It was approved on a vote of 98-7, with one abstention.

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